

The Extent of the Bible

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Psalm 119

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As you're being seated this morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Psalm, chapter 119. Today, we're going to be in Psalm 119, beginning in verse 89. Now, I know there are some of you that throughout the course of the message, I'll make allusions to or references to a series of verses. There's another somewhat secondary passage that I'm going to spend a little time in today. It's found in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 and 17. I'm not going to ask us to turn there for the sake of time, but some of you may want to go ahead and mark that as we address it at the beginning as well as the end of the message.

Today, though, our primary text Psalm 119, beginning in verse 89. If you're a guest or visitor with us, I want to welcome you to a very strategic journey through what we've come to know as the longest chapter of the Bible, 176 verses divided into 22 sections, but with one primary goal, to encourage us to realize the primacy that the word of God should and can have in our lives, and each and every week as we gather, we study a respective eight verse section of this incredible chapter out of 176 verses, 172 of them specifically mentioned and/or referenced or allude to what you and I know as the Bible. And today, we're going to speak to the extent of the Bible and when I say about the extent of the Bible, really what we're addressing today is what is its capacity, and I know that most of us, that I guess first mentioned, would agree with and amen its capacity and its extent but today, we're going to address three very specific issues. We're going to talk about the permanence of the Bible. We're going to talk about the parameters. But as we grow closer to the end of the message today, I want you to hang in there with me because we're going to talk about what does the Bible have as far as its capacity to the extent of its power in our lives.

Psalm 119, beginning verse 89.

89 For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. 90 Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. 91 They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants. 92 Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. 93 I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me. 94 I am thine, save me; for I have sought

thy precepts. 95 The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies. 96 I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

Now, this passage begins in verse 89 with what oftentimes we refer to as a salient verse; that's not elevating it above any other portion of verse in Scripture, but just one of those that kind of serves as a theological hook that we can hang a whole lot of passages on. It says, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." What does that mean? What that means is two words I want to introduce to you, if you're not familiar with them, is this, that what we know as the Bible, the scriptures, the word of God, that it is both inspired by God and it is preserved by God. Now, those are important aspects, but they're a little bit different. Let me describe those to you. When we say that the Bible is inspired by God, we mean not only that it was originated with God, but spoken by him. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, it says all scripture is inspired by God. Now let me pause there for just a moment. That first word of that verse is critical, "all" scripture. Not some, not most, not the ones you like versus the one you don't like, or what passages are palatable to our culture. It says all scripture is inspired by God. It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, for correction. Now what does that mean? When it says that all scripture is inspired by God, it means that he breathed it. He spoke it into existence much like in Genesis when he took the clay and he formed the first man Adam, he breathed into him and he became a quote, living soul. What did God do? God breathed into humanity his word to be given to, and as we'll see in a moment, be preserved forever.

Now let me illustrate what it means by biblical inspiration because it's at this point that there are some individuals that struggle with the veracity of the word of God. And I'm going to be quite honest, one of the reasons some of us struggle is because we watch way too much late night cable television, okay, and some of those programs that bring the so-called experts in to dispute and to question and debate. So let me give you a little illustration. The Bible, as you and I know it, was inspired, it was breathed by God with over 40 individuals being the recipient of the message, over a time period of 1,500 years, in three different languages, on three different continents, and they all speak the same message. Now, if you want proof and evidence that what you have in your hand is derived by and spoken by God himself, all you've got to do is go back in time when you were a youngster and you played a little game. Now, I don't know about in your day what they called, but in my day, they played at the telephone game. Typically, we would get in a circle and the teacher, the leader, whomever it was, would whisper a message into the first recipient's ear. They were then told to repeat the same message to the next person and to the next and to the next. If you've ever played that game, by the time the message gets back to the one who originated it, it never matches the original message. Why? Because even within a time span of a few moments with just a dozen humans, we always mess it up but 40 men, 1,500 years, three languages on three continents, and we have a single solitary message.

The miracle of the inspiration of the word of God but then there is the preservation. Now, this is the one that's more apropos or more applicable to you and I individually because

when we talk about preservation, what we mean is that it's just as valid for us today as it was in its original state. Now, we just spoke about inspiration, and God spoke, and he did so through the languages of what we know as Hebrew and Greek and a little bit of Aramaic, the book of Daniel and a few other places. I don't know about you, but those are languages that are not on the tip of my tongue, much less yours. So when we talk about preservation, we go to Psalm chapter 12, verse 6 and 7. Now remember, verse 89 says, "For ever your word is settled in heaven, O God." Psalm 12:6 and 7 says the words of God are pure words. They have been purified seven times like silver. Then you get to verse 7, "O LORD, you have kept them, thou preserves them from this generation forever." Now what was God's promise? God's promise was that though he spoke it at a different time, in a different language, it would always be available to all people at all times.

Now if anybody can understand the doctrine of preservation, it should be a group of Southerners. Now, I understand not everybody watching online is from the South. I understand not everybody here originates from the South but we have a practice here that other people call preserving, we call it canon. Not canning, canon, all right? Now, y'all know what that is, and I do as well. There's apostrophe on the end of that word. But when we can items, or we preserve items, what we do is we take the abundance of the fruit typical harvest, and we make sure that we can eat that item in the off season, next season, or in the case of your grandmother, decades from now. Y'all know what I mean? Woo, some of that stuff. You know, you know you're in the South when you're at Grandma's house, and you pull down one of those cans, and you say, "Hey Grandma, what's this?" And she goes, "Well I think it is..." That being said, just as a hypothetical example, I want you to imagine that you have picked a fresh peach, okay? Picked a fresh peach, obviously in season you can eat it there, day or two later, everything's great, but you want to be able to eat peaches when the season for picking is not right. So what do you do? You take those peaches, place them in a can, you add a series of other ingredients, do you not, and there's sugar and syrups and all this different thing, and then you seal it up tight so that days, weeks, or as we joke, years later, you can enjoy peaches.

Now, here's the distinction that I want to call to your attention. When you break out that can of peaches, it's not the same look, it's not the same consistency, but it's still a peach. When Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 verse 18, he said, "Heaven and earth will pass away before one jot or tittle of my word will pass away," what he was stating is based on Psalm 12 verse 7, that the word of God has been preserved not only in the generation of Moses, not only in the generation of David, not only in the generation of Paul the apostle, but in ours as well. We may not be reading and studying it in the same language or in the same culture, but I got news for you, nobody opens up a can of preserved peaches and goes, "Huh? Is that an apple? Is that a pear?" You know that it is still a peach. So when we talk about the permanence of the word of God, it was spoken by God and to this day you can have absolute confidence that because it's been preserved, you open this book much like you open up a can of preserved peaches and it is of the same substance as when it was first put into print.

Now that's the permanence, now let's talk about the parameters. We pick up the story in verse 90, "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants. Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction." When we talk about the parameters of the word of God, it really in these verses deals with the past, deals with the present and deals with the future. Let's talk about the past for just a moment. It says that the creative order that the earth was created established by God himself. Now there are ample passages all over your Bible that testify that everything that we know, everything we can see, touch, feel and experience originated literally by the voice of God. In fact in John 1 and Colossians 1 it says he spoke it into creation. But you know the one verse that just kind of gets me when we talk about this is in Genesis chapter 1 verse 14. I know there's a lot of discussion and debate about that first chapter of Genesis. We have on day one what we know as light and darkness and then it's not to day four that you get what we know as the sun and the moon. But there in verse 14, it says God made the greater light to rule the day, the sun. He made the lesser light to rule the night, what we know as the moon. Here's the part about that verse that gets me every single time and it says, and he threw out the stars as well. Now think about that for just a moment. By conservative estimates, there are billions of stars in our universe. By what we might call academic standards, there are trillions of them. Now you realize when you look out at the night sky and you see the vastness of the creative order and it literally says and God just kind of flung them in as if almost it was an afterthought. The book of Hebrews chapter 11 the great chapter of faith verse 3 it says the worlds that exist today were framed by the word of God. In other words, when we talk about the word of God, it testifies that everything that we have and everything we experience originated with him.

Then let's talk about the present. Notice what it says in verse 91, "They continue this day." What that means is this, that in spite of what the quote latest fad or concept may be, the reason that the creative order is still in existence is because God allows it to be so. And I've got news for those who like to do more research than they do praying. Y'all notice what I said about that, is this world does not come to an end because a bunch of people drive diesel trucks. This world comes to an end because in 2 Peter chapter 3, God says, "I will bring it to an end." And then it says he will create it anew. The very fact, Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3 says that the creative order is sustained by the word of God. Now this is amazing because you go back to the Old Testament, particularly the book of Joshua chapter 10, one of the most famously debated passages in all the Bible. It says there that the quote sun stood still. Now let's go ahead and be honest. Anybody with any type of rudimentary or incredible background in the scientific observation of life cannot grasp what that means. I mean, it's just tough. It makes your heads spin. What do you mean the sun stood still? What do you mean the day extended 24 hours beyond what we're used to? Well, I've got news for you, if God established and created it and God sustains it, he can do with it whatever he wants, even if we don't understand it.

So the very fact of our existence today testifies to the veracity of the word of God but let's talk about the future. Notice it says in verse 92, it gets a little personal here, "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction." Then fast

forward to verse 94, it says, "I am thine, save me." And when we speak about one's future, we're speaking about you and I. He makes it personal, does he not? He says it's one thing that the world was created by God, established by God, and sustained by God, but what about me? It says my life would perish if it were not for his law and his word. Job chapter 14 verse 5 says God numbers a man's days. Now I'm all for being healthy and exercising and eating somewhat right based on southern standards, but nonetheless did you know the Bible says there's nothing you can do to add to your days? Now the Bible says in Proverbs multiple times a fool can shorten his days, right? But that being said, when we start addressing these matters of our days in light of the word of God, Leviticus chapter 18, I know Leviticus is the favorite book of the Bible for all things Baptist. I know that. In Leviticus chapters 18 and 19, if you've never blushed when you've read the Bible, you will in those two chapters. Let me tell you what those two chapters tell you. They tell you every way not to handle your body with another person. Does that communicate to everybody? Some of y'all turn to Leviticus and say, "Man, this might get good today." But in verse 5, I want you to hear what the Bible tells. Before it goes through all these sordid sins, before it goes through all this, quote, behavior, it says that if you and I adhere to the word of God, it brings us life.

Now, let me address one of the biggest misconceptions of the Bible. One of the great misconceptions of the Bible is that all of the "thou shalt not's" and the "thou shalt's" and the rules and the regulations are because God wants to spoil your fun and make your life miserable. That's not the case. In fact, what he is saying to us is that if you will do it my way, I will give you the days that I promised and I will give you life between now and then. I will illustrate using the subject matter of Leviticus chapters 18 and 19. Now, I know you realize, but this is a month that in the sports world we refer to as being mad. There's a lot of good basketball going on. Some of y'all are gonna exit quick, because at noon, we got a big game today, don't we? But nonetheless, just thought I'd bring that up. But when we talk about, there's been basketball on, I mean, nonstop lately, and I love it. Have you noticed that the later in the evening, the, shall we say, more provocative the commercials get? Oh yeah. You know, there is an abundance of commercials out there today that they are promoting medicinal properties, they're promoting prescription medications, they're promoting all these things, listen, that will extend your life if you have certain types of sordid diseases. You know what's interesting is if you read Leviticus 18 and 19, and you actually do what those pages tell you to do, you won't have to worry about taking those prescriptions because those prescriptions are to address issues that you never have if you handle your body the way God told you to. In other words, when we do what God says, it doesn't spoil our life, it prolongs and fulfills our life.

Then you go into verse 94 and what does he cry? He says, save me. Now think about it, in a physical sense, we could talk about death and disease and struggles and such, but from a spiritual sense, it doesn't matter how healthy you are, how many years you live, how wonderful your life has been from your perspective, every single one of us one day is going to stand before an almighty holy God and there is no amount of behavior, there's no matter of self-righteousness that somehow, someday is going to justify you before God. So when he says there, "God, save me according to thy law," you know, according to the Bible, every one of us has sinned, the wages of our sin is death, but God, in his

love for us, Christ came and died for our sins, if we believe, if we confess, he forgives us, and listen, he, quote, saves us. You know, the Bible says, and I'm gonna quote it at the end of the service, Romans 10:13, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It doesn't say whoever joins the church. It doesn't say whoever's baptized. It doesn't say whoever does this or does that. It says whoever calls on his name. In other words, what the Bible does is it tells us how to have a future prosperous physical life, more importantly, it tells us how to have a future prosperous spiritual life that according to John 3:16 is everlasting. That means without end.

So what about the power? What about the power that the word of God possesses? I told you to hang on to the end here. Verse 95, "The wicked have waited for me to destroy me." You may not realize how much the word of God is capable of protecting you. I know that in recent days and throughout this calendar year, we as a church body as a whole, as individuals, we challenged ourselves to memorize scripture and to hide it in our heart. And some of you are like me, you've got one of those passages that you rarely hear preached or taught on and daily devotionals are rarely derived from it, and at times you look at those words on paper and you ask the question, why? Why is this important? One of the things that our Bible memorization challenge has done, it's challenged our theology of scripture. Do we really believe that all of it is powerful or just the passages that we like to gravitate toward?

And that being said, some years ago, I found myself in an area that in the missions world we just refer to as Southeast Asia. It was an area where missionaries at times have to go what we might call incognito. It was a community where Christian believers were in a very much statistical minority and those that were of other faiths had a tendency and a tradition of being very violent toward Christians. I arrived there for about a two-week stay. By the time I arrived, what we might call ground zero, so to speak, all those that were there kept telling me, there's this pastor you've got to meet. There's this pastor you've got to meet. And I said, okay, great. And so we're going about things. It was about two days later that we had arranged this time for to meet this pastor. He made his way toward me, and he was one of those individuals that from a distance just had this gleaming smile. One of those smiles that you could see coming a mile away. The closer that he got to me, I realized he had a big smile and he was joyful but that wasn't what I was seeing. This man had two very distinctive scars. Both of them started at the corner of his mouth and extended all the way toward his ears. I'm not trying to make light of this story, but the best way I can picture it for you is remember the old Batman cartoon and the Joker, now he had a smile that literally covered his whole face. Now understand, I'm in a community where English is not the primary language and there's translators going back and forth and such. Finally, these men told this fact, tell them your story, tell them your story, tell your story. Here's the story that this young man told me. He was a pastor of a local community, local church and he'd been warned by these of other faiths. He'd been warned to quit preaching Jesus and talking about Jesus. He was told shut down the church or pay the price. One day the price came. He was jumped by about a half a dozen individuals. Technically we might say he was mugged. But in the process of hitting him and stealing anything he had on him, they made it very clear to him that their intent was so that he would never speak the name of Jesus again. Now hold on to your stomachs.

They took what you and I would call today a fishing filet knife, inserted it in his mouth, and tore the skin on both sides all the way up so he could never speak the name of Jesus again.

Now you know and I know per the story, he's healed physically and he was speaking and able to proclaim the name of Jesus again, but here as one famous antidote say is the rest of the story. Here I am hearing this story and I'm amazed by it. But y'all know I'm a curious cat and I like to kind of get in the weeds and I kind of like to dig down and I'm grateful that God healed him and has provided for him and he's still preaching. But I had to ask the question that you're asking. When this happened, did you like go into shock? I mean, did you like pass out? Did you faint? He said, "Oh no, no, no, no." He said, "I was awake the whole time." I said, the pain. It must have been incredible. He said, "Pain? What pain?" Now remember, we got translators here. Obviously, we've got a breakdown in communication. So I made it very clear. I said, I need to know physical pain and I went through a bunch of different description of, and he kept saying, "Pain, no pain, no pain, no pain." I said, help me, I don't understand. What do you mean you didn't have, you saw the picture I described to you and here's what he told me on the sidewalks of that city. He said a couple weeks before, he said, I memorized, that word's important for us this year, right? He said, I memorized Proverbs 17:22, "A merry heart makes like medicine." He said, "I quoted it the whole time they attacked me and I'm telling you I never felt a thing."

Now ladies and gentlemen, you may not have witnessed it, I saw it, I heard it, and it blew my mind. Most likely in your context in your life, a story like that's not gonna happen but do you realize, we have an old phrase as kids, sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me. You know that's a lie from the pit of hell, right? Y'all do realize that? Sometimes it is the word of God and only the word of God that will get you through what somebody said to you, will get you through what you're walking through, will get you through that valley of the shadow of death that you don't ever think you're gonna make it to the other side. It has the power to protect us no matter what the situation or the scenario.

But it also has the power to perfect us. Now notice the last verse in this section, verse 96, "I've seen the end of all perfection," in other words, nobody is quote perfect now. Let me make a quick clarification. In your Bible, the word perfect is not a synonym of sinlessness. Think baseball. Okay, if a pitcher throws a perfect game that means 27 batters, 27 outs, no walks, right? In other words, he did it as well as you could do it. When interviewing a pitcher who's accomplished this feat, have you ever heard a sideline reporter say, "How does it feel to be sinless?" They don't. Perfection means that you fulfilled the expectation as you were summoned to do to the highest degree, quote, humanly possible.

I mentioned earlier 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, all scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction, righteousness. Now here's where's verse 17 comes into play. You ready for what it says? So that the man of God might be perfect. You know what that means? That means that the word of God gives you

instructions so that you can live your life, you can make decisions, you can speak words, you can go places and not go places, that the Lord says that's how you're supposed to live. In other words, today there are thousands of voices that are telling us how we're supposed to live, how we're supposed to think, what we're supposed to be a part, what we're supposed to support, what we're supposed to abhor, whatever it may be but the word of God says, I will perfect the man of God. In other words, it will teach us, it will instruct us, per verse 16, at times it will rebuke us so that we can live the life that God always designed us to live.

Let me ask you a very simple closing rhetorical question: how many more agendas, how many more perspectives, how many more means of communication are we gonna see come and go before we finally say, "Okay, God, I'm just gonna do it your way"? In Acts, there's a man by the name of Gamaliel. He's a Jewish priest. People are upset about Jesus and the followers of Jesus. He makes a profound observation. He says, "If it is of God, you can't stop it. If it's of man, it'll go away." Did you know that the single most voluminous printed book in the world is in your hand? Over 50 countries currently have banned its existence within their borders and it still hasn't gone away. Why? Because it is of God. It's permanent. It has the parameters of the past, the present, and the future. It will protect you. And no matter what the situation, it will perfect you and show you how your life has been designed to live.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. As we come to this time in our service, I mentioned earlier that that verse in 94 says, save me. I quoted Romans 10 verse 13, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today you're that person that the Spirit of God took the word of God and made it clear and that you're trying to establish your eternity, you're trying to establish your relationship with God based on what you do versus what you don't do, or based on expectations or metrics that a person or an organization or an entity has burned you with. The Bible just sets us free and says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today you're that person. Can I entourage you to do so? You don't have to do so out loud. You don't have to repeat the same words that I would say. In fact, this isn't about reading a script, this is about your heart's cry, but maybe today your heart's cry goes something like this. "God, today, Lord, I understand that your word, your Bible is true about me. I have sinned. God, I've been places I shouldn't have been. I've participated in things I shouldn't have been a part of. Lord, I have used words and had thoughts that are so contrary to you. And your Bible says the wages, the result of my sin is but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, God, I want you to know I believe, I believe I got a sin problem that's all my fault and Jesus Christ is the only one who can solve it. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf. He lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, today I believe that when he allowed himself to be nailed to his cross he was bearing the pain and the punishment of my sin. God, today I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he made it feasible, he made it possible that my sin could be forgiven and my soul could be saved. God, today I don't have the answer to the problems and the struggles of this old broken world, but I know this one thing, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, Lord, I just want to turn my life over to you."

Now with our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe today you're that person. You can be seated at the front, the back, the sides, the middle, the top, the bottom. You can be online. Maybe today's that day where you cried out for Jesus to save you. In just a moment, I'm gonna pray for us. We're gonna stand and sing together, and I wanna invite you, wherever you are, just to step out and step forward. We just wanna just celebrate with you. We wanna pray with you. We wanna pray over you. We just want the blessing of knowing what God's been doing and is doing in your life. Or maybe today you say, "Pastor, I got that covered." But maybe today you say, "You know, I hear a lot about baptism around here. I'd like to have a conversation about that." Or maybe you're one of those individuals we meet each and every week that ask us, what does it mean to be a part of the church, a member of the church? We'd love to sit down and have that conversation. Or maybe today you say, "You know what, I'm going through a rough time. I really could use somebody to pray with me or pray for me." Whatever the Lord is doing in your life, we just want the privilege to be a part of it.

Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you that today, your word is enough. Lord, if we're lost and need saving, you tell us how to be saved. Lord, if we're struggling through the valley of the shadow of death, you give us instruction on how to be encouraged. Lord, there's not a situation or a scenario today, Lord, that your word has not given us what we need. Lord, help us today to simply believe what you've spoken and not what somebody else is selling. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.